

**Wiswall-Orne House**  
**107 Auburn Street**  
**Final Landmark Designation Study Report**  
**Case L-79**

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February 13, 2006

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**Executive Summary**

The Wiswall-Orne House is a locally rare and substantially intact example of the rear-wall chimney Federal house, constructed in 1803-1804, and significant for its associations with the Orne and Stone families in Cambridge and with Caroline Frances Orne in particular. The house is also historically and architecturally significant in terms of its period, style and method of construction, as one of a small number of Federal period houses surviving in Cambridge. It meets criteria (1) and (2) of the Chapter 2.78, Article III of the Cambridge City Code. The Cambridge Historical Commission voted unanimously at a public hearing on February 2, 2006 to recommend the property for designation by order of the City Council.

## I. Location and Economic Status

### A. Address, Parcel Number and Zoning

The Wiswall-Orne House, built in 1803-1804, is located at 107 Auburn Street on the north side of Auburn Street, between Pearl and Brookline streets (See Illus. #1, p.4). The house sits on a lot that measures 3,100 square feet (Map 93 / Lot 42). The lot frontage is 33', the rear dimension is 28', and the lot is 100' deep. The most recent deed, dated May 31, 2005, is recorded in book 45295, page 528 of the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.

The assessed value for the land and buildings according to the FY06 Assessor's Department online property database is \$483,900. The property is zoned Residence C-1, a multifamily residential district with a Floor Area Ratio limit of 0.75, a height limit of 35 feet, and a minimum of 1,500 square feet per dwelling unit. The zone allows for a variety of residential and institutional uses, including single, two-family and multi-family use as of right; transient tourist, townhouse, and congregate housing use with a special permit; and religious, healthcare, or educational uses under the Institutional Use Regulations.

The assessed gross floor area of the house is 2,173. This total includes the original front part of the house (17' x 30'), a rear addition (19' x 16'), and an attached storage shed (7' x 5') and includes currently unoccupied basement floor area. The house is approximately 22' tall. If all this floor area were counted in FAR calculations on the 3,100 square foot lot, the FAR would be approximately .70, which is 152 square feet below that allowed by zoning. The lot area would also allow two dwelling units on the property. Because of the placement of the structure on the lot, the property is substantially non-conforming as to the front and side yard setbacks. Thus, additional construction would require zoning relief in the form of variances from the allowable dimensional requirements.

### B. Ownership and Occupancy

The property is owned by Jill Shulman and Merhi Sater, who purchased it in 2005 from the estate of Carlton J. Barron. The house was constructed as a single-family residence and was most recently occupied as such by Carlton Barron until his death in 2002. The front part of the house (1803-04) includes two rooms on each floor, one on either side of a central stair hall. The rear addition (ca. 1845) contains the kitchen and access to the basement stairs.

The property is currently unoccupied and undergoing interior renovations that have been reviewed by the staff of the Historical Commission. An application for a Certificate of Appropriateness was reviewed by the Historical Commission on January 5, 2006. The application to demolish the ell and construct a new addition and to renovate the exterior of the house, including installation of new windows, was approved in principle, subject to the approval of construction details by the Architects Committee. The owners intend to occupy the house themselves.

A rehabilitation project in 1990, which was funded in part with a preservation grant, resulted in the donation of a preservation restriction for the property. This restriction was signed by then owner, Carlton Barron, but a recorded copy has not been located at the registry of deeds, and the restriction is not considered to be currently in force.

### C. Area Description

The Wiswall-Orne House stands on the north side of Auburn Street, three houses west of Brookline Street. It is located in the Salem-Auburn streets area of the Cambridgeport neighborhood, which is characterized by mostly single-family and two-family dwellings of small scale, densely sited on narrow streets. This portion of Salem and Auburn streets, between Pearl and Brookline streets, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982, as the Salem Street/Auburn Street National Register District. The district includes properties that reflect the early nineteenth century period of development of Cambridgeport.

The house is just three blocks away from Lafayette Square, the center of early business and development activity in Cambridgeport. The house is located on the far eastern boundary of the National Register district. It is the oldest house in the district. The second oldest house on the block is located at 57-59 Brookline Street/101 Auburn Street. It dates to 1809, but the boundary of the National Register district was not drawn to include this house. The house opposite at 108-110 Auburn Street dates to 1819 but stylistically exhibits the Georgian tradition. To the west at 113 Auburn Street is an Italianate style house of 1862. A three-decker built at 103-105 Auburn Street in 1915 was modified in 1975 by taking off the top story. The Kennedy Biscuit Lofts and new low-rise residential buildings in University Park are located on the east side of Brookline Street.

Though Pearl and Brookline streets are busy one-way corridors linking Central Square and the river, the quieter connecting streets like Auburn, William, and Cottage streets do not have excessive traffic problems. Parking is allowed on both sides of Auburn Street, which allows one-way traffic from east to west.

### D. Planning Issues

Planning concerns for the Wiswall-Orne House relate primarily to its small scale and historic method of construction in a zoning district that encourages multi-family residences of a denser nature. The house has probably survived up until this point only because the narrowness of the lot discourages a larger development on the site. The house had been vacant for two or three years before it was put up for sale by the estate of its most recent owner. The Cambridge Historical Commission voted to initiate landmark proceedings on February 3, 2005, after receiving several demolition inquiries from interested buyers. The Commission affirmed its decision to initiate the study at a public hearing held on March 3, 2005.

The zoning allowances of the C-1 zone, the presence of additional development potential on the site, and Cambridge's escalating housing market will continue to put pressure on the property to be developed as fully as possible. The landmark designation study has enabled the Historical Commission to review the current renovations and ensured the preservation of the property through the transition of ownership.

## E. Map



1. Property Map of 107 Auburn Street, City of Cambridge GIS, January 24, 2006

## II. Description

### A. Type and Use

The Wiswall-Orne House is a wood-frame residence. There are no accessory buildings on the property, though a garage was formerly located at the northeast corner of the lot. The house has been owner-occupied for many years. It is being renovated and will continue in single-family use.

### B. Physical Description

The house is an early example of Federal style architecture in Cambridge. The two-story house has a gable roof, oriented gable-end to the street. (See Illustrations #2-4, pp. 6-7) The pitch of the roof is shallow and the second floor windows are positioned very close to the eaves. As was also typical during the Georgian period, the façade of the house consists of five bays with a center entrance. The front of the house, positioned on the flank side of the gable form, faces the east, and the windows on this façade are symmetrically placed. The center entrance is sheltered by a modest hood, with a hip roof and Italianate-style brackets. A one-story ell is attached on the north side of the house.

The house has a typical Federal style center-hall plan, with a stair hall just inside the front door and a room on either side of it. Originally, each of the rooms had a chimney on the rear wall. The one-story Greek Revival addition contains the kitchen on the first floor and an unoccupied attic for storage on the second.

The few alterations to the exterior of the house occurred during the mid-nineteenth century. A one-story ell on the north end of the house dates to ca. 1845. This addition is characteristic of the Greek Revival style, with a steeper gable roof and wide entablature. The window sash, which would have originally been 6-over-6 double-hung, were likely changed to the present 2-over-2 configuration in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Italianate entrance hood with large brackets was added at about the same time.

As part of the current renovations, the house has been gutted of interior finishes, except for fireplace mantels, some original doors, and door and window frames. Settling of the house and the shifting and torque caused by the deterioration of the chimneys had caused some of the roof trusses to be severely out of alignment with the exterior wall framing. With staff approval, the roof was completely reframed and other structural members such as wall studs and floor joists were sistered with new material. Clapboards in sound condition are being retained and others replaced in kind where necessary. Many of the clapboards and some sash were replaced as part of a rehabilitation project in 1990-1991.

The house is set 2' back from Auburn Street. The left (west) setback is nonconforming, at under 3'. The proposed new ell will lessen this nonconformity by being placed further away from the west property line. The rear yard is large, with approximately 50' from the back wall of the house to the rear property line. A curb cut exists on the east side of the property and a right of way in common for a shared driveway with the house at 103-105 Auburn Street is recorded in Deed Book 8543, Page 601.



Among the original exterior details present on the main house are the rake moldings on the gable ends, some clapboards, window casings, and sills.

The one-story ell was constructed ca. 1845 in the Greek Revival style, but its date cannot be fully clarified in the atlases and Engineering Department House Books. The earliest depiction of the footprint is an 1878 field sketch (House Book 18, page 78) that shows the main house with dimensions of 16.9' x 29.6' and the ell with dimensions of 19.4' wide and 16.7' long.

A garage was constructed in the rear yard between 1916 and 1923. It was razed in 1975.

Building permit records indicate that permits were issued for roofing (b.p.#64529, 7/12/1965), razing the garage (b.p.#73342, 9/19/1975), reinforcing the floor joists with two lally columns and replacing sections of rotted sill (b.p. #80204, 8/2/1990), and repairs to the clapboards, entrance canopy, and 10 window sash (b.p. #92418, 9/24/1991).

### C. Current Photographs



2. 107 Auburn Street, front (east) and Auburn Street (south) elevations, January 2006.  
Photo by Sarah L. Burks.





3. 107 Auburn Street, rear (west) and Auburn street (south) elevations, with ell, January 2006. Photo by Sarah L. Burks.



4. 107 Auburn Street, view of rear of ell from Franklin Street, January 2006. Photo by Sarah L. Burks.

### III. History of the Property

#### A. Historic Development Patterns

##### 1. Deed History of the Property

The settlement of Cambridgeport was made possible by the construction of the West Boston Bridge in 1793. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, most of Cambridgeport was controlled by two landowners, William Jarvis and Francis Dana. The Salem-Auburn neighborhood, however, originated as part of a substantial tract of land owned by William Watson that was surrounded by Francis Dana's holdings south of Massachusetts Avenue. In 1800 and 1801, Dana and Watson cooperated to rationalize their joint property lines. They laid out Pearl, Brookline, and Franklin streets, and began to sell lots there and on Massachusetts Avenue. Watson alone laid out Auburn Street in 1802 and began to sell large parcels to housewrights who subdivided them into smaller house lots.

On October 7, 1803, Watson sold an irregularly shaped parcel at the corner of Auburn, Brookline, and Franklin streets, measuring 129' on Auburn, 200' on Brookline, and 111' on Franklin, to John Palmer Wiswall for \$150 (Middlesex South Book 153/Page 333). The parcel is described as lot #12 on a plan of sundry house lots laid out on Watson's land, but the plan has not been found.

Wiswall, a housewright, laid out a lot measuring 29' at front x 100' deep x 20' at rear and constructed the house that is now 107 Auburn Street. He subdivided and sold the rest of the land he had purchased from Watson to other housewrights in just over a year's time. (See Illustration #5 for sketch of subdivision). He sold a quarter of the parcel to John Rice, a housewright, and another quarter to Prince Howland Otis, another housewright, both in late October 1803. Abutting the 107 Auburn Street house lot, he sold a 100' x 50' lot at the corner of Brookline and Auburn streets to John Wheeler, a laborer. The last lot sold by Wiswall abutted his own on the northeast side, with 50' frontage on Brookline Street. It sold to William Loring Cushing, a housewright, on December 28, 1804.

Wiswall sold the land and the house at 107 Auburn Street to Asaph Harlow, Jr., a tailor of Boston, for \$1200 on March 21, 1805 (Book 162/Page 121). The property changed hands another three times by November 1806. Jesse Marsh and Samuel Baxter divided the property into two halves and each sold their half, Marsh to Nathaniel Chandler in 1807 and Baxter to Jonathan Jenks in 1808. The property was consolidated again in 1815 when Timothy L. Jennison, a local physician, acquired both halves.

Jennison sold the combined property to Asaph Stone, a merchant of Philadelphia, on September 30, 1822 for \$650 (Book 244/Page 406). Asaph Stone was the brother of Ann Stone Orne, of the Cambridge and Watertown Stone family. In 1853, the widowed Ann acquired the property from her brother (Book 660/Page 53) for \$1 and "natural love and affection," but she had in fact been occupying the home with her family for many years. Ann died on February 29, 1872 and left no will, but her single daughter, Caroline Frances Orne, acquired the property from the other heirs (Book 1206/Page 77). Caroline Orne lived at 107 Auburn Street until her death in 1905, at which time the property passed to her nephew, Charles P. Orne (Book 3132/457).



Subsequent deeds record the sale of the house from the Orne family to the Daniel Brennan family (Book 4137/Page 569) in 1917, and then half Brennan's interest was sold to Elizabeth A. Mansfield in 1938 (Book 6213/Page 138). The estate of Daniel Brennan and Elizabeth Mansfield sold the property in 1965 to Ruby J. Barron, of Cambridge (Book 10,851/Page 124). Ruby transferred the deed to her husband, Joseph M. Barron, of Woodstock, NH in 1967 (Book 11,361/Page 24). The property then passed to their son, Carlton (or Carleton) Barron on November 7, 1973, who had been residing there with his mother (Book 12,551/Page 558). The current deed, from the estate of Carlton Barron to Merhi Sater and Jill Shulman, is dated May 31, 2005 (Book 45295, page 528).

## 2. Development History of Parcel and Surroundings

The SalemStreet/Auburn Street National Register district contains many of the oldest houses remaining in Cambridgeport. The small scale of the buildings and the narrow streets retain the village quality of Cambridgeport in the first half of the 19th century. The settlement here originally focused on Lafayette Square and the Cambridgeport Meetinghouse at the intersection of Main Street and Massachusetts Avenue. (See Illustration #6) Little other development occurred south of Massachusetts Avenue until after 1850.

From the time of the first settlement in 1630 until 1793 when the West Boston Bridge opened, Cambridgeport consisted of salt marshes and woodland. It was used for mowing, pasturage, orchards and plowing reflecting the agrarian economy of the period. The primary settlement in Cambridge continued to be in the vicinity of Harvard Square. Many Cambridge residents of the period lived in houses near Harvard Square and retained tracts of open land in the Cambridgeport area for grazing their livestock, gathering salt marsh hay and other agricultural purposes.

The settlement of Cambridgeport was made possible by the construction of the West Boston Bridge in 1793. Prior to that time, there were only three houses in Cambridge east of Quincy Street, and the area south of present Massachusetts Avenue was completely unpopulated. Most of Cambridgeport was controlled by two landowners, William Jarvis and Francis Dana. Andrew Craigie also owned property in Cambridgeport but his focus for development was on East Cambridge, where he controlled all the land. (See Illustration #7)

William Jarvis, a speculator, acquired the Ralph Inman estate in 1792, and with it most of Cambridgeport north of present Massachusetts Avenue. Chief Justice Francis Dana, a descendant of an old Cambridge family, controlled not only land along Dana Hill but also most of Cambridgeport south of Massachusetts Avenue. Jarvis and Dana worked with the Proprietors of the West Boston Bridge to lay out Main Street, but did not otherwise develop a master plan for the area. While Jarvis's property was seized by the Federal government and sold piecemeal in 1801, Francis Dana and his descendants controlled the development of their lands for much of the 19th century.

After the construction of the West Boston Bridge, a growing number of merchants and tradesmen were attracted to the area and began to establish businesses along Main Street the causeway leading to the West Boston Bridge. Among these was William Watson who

built a hotel at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Pearl Street. The Salem-Auburn neighborhood originated as part of a substantial parcel of land in the center of Dana's holdings that was owned by William Watson. In 1800 and 1801, Dana and Watson laid out Pearl, Brookline, and Franklin Streets, and began to sell lots there and on Massachusetts Avenue. (See Illustration #8)

William Watson (ca. 1755-1811) was a painter and glazier who lived near Harvard Square. According to one source, he received this tract as "compensation for maintaining an aged colored woman, formerly a slave, called Venus Whittemore; although by some defect in the written obligations, she finally became a public charge and died in the almshouse May 4, 1825, aged 107" (Paige, 681). The title to this land, which ran between Pearl and Brookline Streets from Massachusetts Avenue to Valentine Street, and along William and Cottage Streets to Pleasant Street, has not been searched but may have originated with Samuel Whittemore (1693-1784), the previous owner of Watson's house in Harvard Square and a possible former master of Venus Whittemore.

While Watson soon sold his Massachusetts Avenue frontage, sales off the avenue were slow. Watson divided his land into parcels containing 10,000 to 20,000 square feet, which may have been more than the market could absorb. Watson's land between Brookline and Pearl Streets was somewhat removed from the original settlement of Cambridgeport, which took place at Pelham's Island, near the intersection of Main Street and Massachusetts Avenue. Brookline Street ran along the edge of the relatively well-drained upland pastures, separating them from the tidal marshes of the Charles River. The area was noted as a somewhat desolate spot, subject to flooding in storms until the construction of a railroad embankment in 1853. Nevertheless, the earliest houses in the neighborhood, such as 107 Auburn Street (1803), 41-43 Brookline Street (1807, demolished 1968), and 57-59 Brookline Street (1809), stood close to the marsh.

After an initial burst of construction before the Embargo of 1809-1813, there was little building until the economy recovered in the mid 1820s. The neighborhood was fully developed by the end of the 1840s, although some infill construction continued until the end of the 19th century. The area has remained essentially intact from the first period of settlement in Cambridgeport, despite the rise in property values and the University Park redevelopment of the industrial area on the former marsh across Brookline Street.

#### IV. Significance of the Property

##### A. Historical Significance

The historical significance of the Wiswall-Orne House relates to its associations with William Watson and John Palmer Wiswall, the early developers of the neighborhood, and its associations with the Orne family in Cambridge, particularly with Caroline Frances Orne, the first librarian of the Cambridge Public Library.

As described in Section III, William Watson laid out Auburn Street in 1802 and divided it into smaller parcels, which he sold for residential development. John Palmer Wiswall, a housewright, purchased from Watson a 20,000+ square foot lot and subdivided it into five house lots. He retained the smallest lot and constructed the house now called 107 Auburn Street. It is not known whether Wiswall and his wife Meletiah lived at 107

Auburn Street or if its construction was strictly a business endeavor. In deeds, their place of residence did change from Boston to Cambridge between the time when they purchased the property and when they sold it a year and a half later to Asaph Harlow, Jr., a tailor of Boston. Meletiah Wiswall, who was mentioned in the land sales that her husband made in 1803, was not mentioned in the deed to Harlow in 1805. Cambridge Vital Records reveal that an infant Wiswall child died on March 10, 1804 and another member of the Wiswall family died on October 20, 1804. It seems likely that these records are describing Meletiah and her child.

The Stone/Orne family acquired the house in 1822 when Asaph Stone, a merchant of Philadelphia, purchased the property for the benefit of his sister, Ann Stone Orne. Asaph and Ann Stone were descended from Simon Stone, who immigrated in 1635 and settled in Watertown, Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup> Ann Stone (1792-1872) married John Gerry Orne (1786-1838) in 1812. An assessors record from 1823 listed John G. Orne as the taxpayer, indicating that John and Ann Orne were residing at 107 Auburn Street at that time. The deed transferring title from Asaph Stone to his sister was not recorded until 1853, 15 years after Ann was widowed.

John Gerry Orne was born in Marblehead in 1786. After early employment as a supercargo, he built a store in 1807 on Mt. Auburn Street near Gerry's Landing Road, on land sold to him by his uncle, Vice President Elbridge Gerry, but it soon failed.<sup>2</sup> In January 1812 he married Ann Stone, but then served in the War of 1812, during which he was taken prisoner and transported to Halifax. John Gerry Orne and Ann Stone Orne had three daughters, Sarah G., Maria E., and Caroline F., and three sons, Francis H., Charles A., and Joel S. Three of their children died in the 1840s. Caroline, who remained unmarried, was the only single child residing at home when her mother died in 1872. The other heirs sold their shares of the Auburn Street home to Caroline, who remained there until her death in 1905. Joel Stone Orne, Caroline's younger brother, was a pharmacist and operated his drugstore on Main Street in Lafayette Square for over 50 years.

Caroline F. Orne was born September 5, 1818. She was educated in the Cambridge public schools and at a private school in Boston. James Russell Lowell was her contemporary and friend. Caroline showed an early interest in writing and especially in poetry. She published short stories and poetry in literary magazines and wrote several books, among them being, *Lucy's Party and Other Tales* (1842); *Sweet Auburn and Mount Auburn with Other Poems* (1844), which described the landscape of Mount Auburn (Stone's Woods) prior to the opening of the cemetery; *Morning Songs of American Freedom*, a book of poetry (1876); and *A Pioneer in New England in 1635*, an account of the Stone family (1887, reprinted in 1930). Several of her poems were selected for publication in textbooks or other compilations. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, with whom she corresponded, chose her poem, "The Letter of Marque" to include in a compilation of writings of American authors. "The Letter of Marque" steps outside the typical woman's sphere and describes the voyage of a sailing vessel. Another poem, "Labour," reads as a

<sup>1</sup> The land owned by the Stone family in Watertown was commonly called Stone's Woods. The naturally hilly and beautiful terrain was chosen in the early 1830s for the development of the picturesque Mount Auburn Cemetery, the first U.S. example of what would become a movement of landscaped garden cemeteries.

<sup>2</sup> John Gerry Orne's mother, Sarah Gerry Orne, moved the building up the hill to Coolidge Hill Road and converted it into residential use. The house still stands at 10 Coolidge Hill Road.

woman's lament that though a laborer's work is hard, "it is harder still to have no work to do."

Caroline Orne is notable as an early director of the Dana Library, the predecessor of the Cambridge Public Library. The Dana Library originated as the Cambridge Athenaeum, which was founded by Edmund Dana in 1849. The Athenaeum building at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Pleasant Street was purchased by the city in 1858 for use as a city hall and public library (See Illustration #9). The Athenaeum was renamed the Dana Library and opened to the public in 1858; any Cambridge resident known to the librarian and who paid annual dues of \$1 could use it. Because of her education and connections and due to her own initiative, Caroline F. Orne was named the librarian in 1858.

A history of the Cambridge Public Library, published in 1891, printed a photograph of Orne (See Illustration #10) and a second history, published in 1908 described her tenure,

We learn from contemporary records that in 1858, 'the choice of a librarian naturally fell on Miss Caroline F. Orne, because of her interest in the project, her public spirit, and the place she held in the literary circle of Cambridge,' and she filled the office for sixteen years with steadily growing success and popularity. Her acquaintance among the people interested in books was wide, and with her keen personal interest in the she actually guided the choice of reading for many patrons of the library, particularly the young...She enjoyed the friendship of Longfellow, Lowell, and other literary men and women of the time. Her broad acquaintance with the best literature and her excellent judgment and taste were of great value in the selection of books for the library, no less than in encouraging and guiding readers in their use. (Rolfe, p. 13).

Under Orne's leadership, the library increased its collections from 1,400 to 7,000 volumes and expanded its hours from one day a week to six days a week. Her salary increased accordingly. In 1866, a larger space was needed to house the collections, and the library was moved to the Masonic Hall at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Temple Street. In 1874, the requirement of members to pay an annual membership fee of \$1 was done away with, and the library became free to the public. Miss Orne retired from the librarianship and was succeeded by another woman, Miss Almira L. Hayward, who served in the position for 22 years. In 1879, the library trustees voted to emphasize that the library was open to all and changed the name of the institution from the Dana Library to the Cambridge Public Library.

Orne was a member of the Hannah Winthrop Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and she and her publications are mentioned in that group's *Guide to Historic Cambridge*, which was published in 1907. Orne was buried at Mount Auburn Cemetery, in a plot purchased by her brother Joel, with her parents and other members of her family.

Daniel Brennan, a chauffeur who lived next door at 105 Auburn Street, owned 107 Auburn Street and rented it to working class tenants. Joseph and Ruby Barron, a retired African American couple from New Hampshire, acquired the house in 1965 and lived there with their son, Carlton Barron. Carlton Barron was the most recent resident of the house; he died in 2002.



## B. Architectural Significance

The architectural significance of the Wiswall-Orne House relates primarily to its period, style and method of construction. The house is a good example of an early nineteenth century house form, with a five-bay wide façade, center hall, and a pair of chimneys located on the rear wall. This example is only one-bay deep. Larger examples of this type could be two bays deep or three-stories tall, but two stories were typical; in more stylish examples, the house might have a low, hipped roof, but gable roofs were also a standard option. The house could be, and most often was, extended through the addition of rear ells. This type of house could be sited either gable-end to the street, as here on its narrow, urban lot, or with the ridge parallel to the street, which was more common in more open or agrarian settings. While large numbers of these rear-wall chimney Federal houses survive outside Boston in the extended suburbs out to Route 495, in Cambridge, they are comparatively rare.

Very few houses were built in Cambridge in the period following the Revolution, in part because a severe economic depression resulting from the Jeffersonian Embargo of 1807 and the War of 1812 dampened local building, and in part because early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Cambridge was still a relative backwater. There may be as many as 130 pre-1830 houses standing in all of Cambridge (See Illustration #11), but of the period from 1790 to 1830, there are probably fewer than 40 houses surviving and even fewer of the modest vernacular construction of 107 Auburn Street. Examples of houses similar in period and style include 172 Harvard Street, built by Amos Ramsdell in 1805 and 158 Auburn Street, built by Samuel Baxter in 1805. The house at 14 Worcester Street is also very similar in style, exhibiting the same characteristic plan and massing, although it was constructed substantially later in 1829.

All of these pre-1830 houses are timber frame construction, in the vernacular tradition of wood-framed houses brought to the Massachusetts Bay colony by English settlers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The houses were framed with timber sills and roof plates and braced corner posts, and with a roof composed of purlins and rafters. This system of house construction reflects a pre-industrial method of construction that was not fully displaced by modern balloon framing until the 1840s.

In addition to its Federal period date, construction method, and materials, the Wiswall-Orne House also reflects important patterns of historical development. It is the oldest house in the Salem Street/Auburn Street neighborhood. Its location not far from Lafayette Square reflects the evolution of the Cambridgeport neighborhood that grew up out of the transportation improvements on Massachusetts Avenue and around the commercial development in Lafayette Square. (See Illustration #12)

## V. Relationship to Criteria

### A. Article III, Chapter 2.78.180 a.

The enabling ordinance for landmarks states:

The Historical Commission by majority vote may recommend for designation as a landmark any property within the City being or containing a place, structure, feature or object which it determines to be either (1) importantly associated with

one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth or (2) historically or architecturally significant (in terms of its period, style, method of construction or association with a famous architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of structures . . .

## B. Relationship of Property to Criteria

The Wiswall-Orne House meets criterion (1) primarily for its associations with the broad architectural and economic history of the City as a rare surviving example of Federal style architecture in the Cambridgeport neighborhood south of Massachusetts Avenue, which was developing in direct relationship to the improvements afforded to the area by the construction of the West Boston Bridge and the efforts of local landowners like Francis Dana and William Watson. The house is also importantly associated with a historic person in Cambridge, Caroline F. Orne, Cambridge's first public librarian and noted author and poet, and with the historically-significant Orne and Stone families. It meets criterion (2) for its architectural significance in terms of its period, style, and method of construction. The Wiswall-Orne House retains integrity of design, materials, and feeling. It conveys its original architectural qualities in its form, massing, and details.

## VI. Recommendations

### A. Article III, Chapter 2.78.140

The purpose of landmark designation is contained in the enabling ordinance, which is to:

preserve, conserve and protect the beauty and heritage of the City and to improve the quality of its environment through identification, conservation and maintenance of . . . sites and structures which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City; to resist and restrain environmental influences adverse to this purpose; [and] to foster appropriate use and wider public knowledge and appreciation of such . . . structures . . .

### B. Preservation Options

Landmark designation or donation of a new preservation easement are the only options for the permanent long-term protection and preservation of the Wiswall-Orne House. While it is part of the Salem Street/Auburn Street National Register district, National Register listing does not permanently protect and preserve buildings. No plans are underway for historic district or neighborhood conservation district study in the area surrounding the property.

### C. Staff Recommendation

It is the staff recommendation that the Commission find that the Wiswall-Orne House meets the criteria for landmark designation and vote to recommend that the City Council designate the house as a protected landmark under Article III, Chapter 2.78.

## VII. Standards and Criteria

Under Article III, the Historical Commission is charged with reviewing any construction, demolition or alteration that affects the exterior architectural features (other than color) of a designated landmark. This report describes exterior architectural features that are among the characteristics that led to consideration of the property as a landmark. Except as the order designating or amending the landmark may otherwise provide, the exterior architectural features described in this report should be preserved and/or enhanced in any proposed alteration or construction that affects those features of the landmark. The standards following in paragraphs B and C of this section provide specific guidelines for the treatment of the landmark described in this report.

The existing ell, though stylistically interesting for its Greek Revival features, does not represent an important historical event in the house's history. It does not correspond to a shift in ownership or change in use of the house. The ell does not represent the same building type or method of construction as the more rare Federal period form of the main house. The proposed demolition of the ell and construction of a new addition has been reviewed and approved by the Historical Commission, being not incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance, or distinct character of the landmark, neighborhood, and environment and can be constructed in a way that if it were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the landmark would be unimpaired.

### A. General Standards and Criteria

Subject to review and approval of exterior architectural features under the terms of this report, the following standards shall apply:

1. Significant historic and architectural features of the landmark shall be preserved.
2. Changes and additions to the landmark, which have taken place over time, are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood. These changes to the property may have acquired significance in their own right and, if so, that significance should be recognized and respected.
3. Deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced.
4. When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.
5. New materials should, whenever possible, match the material being replaced in physical properties, design, color, texture, and appearance. The use of imitation replacement materials is discouraged.
6. The surface cleaning of a landmark shall be done by the gentlest possible means. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that damage exterior architectural features shall not be used.
7. New additions shall not destroy significant exterior architectural features and shall not be incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance, or distinct character of the landmark, neighborhood, and environment.
8. New additions should be done in a way that if they were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the landmark should be unimpaired.

## B. Suggested Review Guidelines

1. Site/Development Potential: future efforts to construct additional square footage on the site should be focused on the new addition and care should be taken not to expand from or attach to the main house. The framing and finishes of the house should be considered significant artifacts of its history and protected to the extent possible from diminution or loss. Care should be taken to maintain the open, character of the east yard immediately in front of the house. The design of current owners' proposed addition, which was granted a Certificate of Appropriateness on January 5, 2006, is expressly incorporated into these guidelines.
2. Exterior materials should be preserved insofar as practicable. Special care should be taken to protect and maintain the clapboards, rake moldings, and window casings and sills.
3. Window placement and location is a critical element of the architectural character of the house. The east and south walls of the main house are particularly sensitive in this regard and the introduction of additional windows on those walls should be discouraged. The west wall does not exhibit the same symmetry and historically had fewer windows because of the placement of chimneys on that side of the house. Introduction of new window openings on that wall, however, should be limited and retain the typical pattern of double-hung, rectangular-shaped openings.
4. Future owners should be encouraged to maintain and preserve original interior materials and detailing.



## VIII. Proposed Order

### ORDERED:

That the Wiswall-Orne House, 107 Auburn Street, be designated as a protected landmark pursuant to Chapter 2.78, Article III, Section 2.78.180 of the Code of the City of Cambridge, as recommended by vote of the Cambridge Historical Commission on February 2, 2006. The premises so designated is the land defined as parcel 42 of assessor's map 93 and the house thereon and the premises described in a deed recorded in book 45295, page 528 of the South Middlesex Registry of Deeds.

This designation is justified by the important architectural and historical associations the house embodies as a locally rare and substantially intact example of the rear-wall chimney Federal house, constructed in 1803-04, and for its associations with the Orne and Stone families in Cambridge and with Caroline F. Orne in particular. The house is also historically and architecturally significant in terms of its period, style and method of construction, as one of a small number of timber-framed Federal period houses surviving in Cambridge.

The effect of this designation shall be that review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability shall be required before any construction activity can take place within the designated premises or any action can be taken affecting the appearance of 107 Auburn Street, that would in either case be visible from a public way, except construction activity already approved pursuant to vote of the Commission on January 5, 2006. In making determinations, the Commission shall be guided by the terms of the final landmark designation report, dated February 13, 2006, with respect to the designated premises, by Section VII, Standards and Criteria of said report, and by the applicable sections of Chapter 2.78, Article III, of the Cambridge Municipal Code.

## IX. Historic Photographs and Maps

See attached pages for the following remaining illustrations:

5. Sketch of subdivision and sales of Wiswall's property at corner of Auburn, Brookline, and Franklin streets from deed research by Sarah L. Burks, January 2006. Not from survey.
6. Watercolor sketch of Massachusetts Avenue, looking toward Lafayette Square, ca. 1825. Chamber of Commerce Collection, Cambridge Historical Commission.
7. Map of Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Landholdings in Cambridgeport, Cambridgeport, Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge, p. 18.
8. Map of Cambridgeport Land Use in 1815, Cambridgeport, Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge, p. 20.
9. Athenaeum Building, Massachusetts Avenue corner of Pleasant Street, from Walling Map of Cambridge, 1854.
10. Photograph of Caroline F. Orne. The Cambridge Public Library, 1891.
11. Hales Map of Cambridge, 1830.
12. Walling Map of Cambridge, 1854, detail of Cambridgeport neighborhood.

## X. Bibliography

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### 2. Government Records and Sources

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Cambridge, Massachusetts. Vital Records to 1850, Volumes I and II.

Middlesex South Registry of Deeds, records for 107 Auburn Street.

### 3. Other Records

Cambridge City Directories.